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THE WILL TO DOUBT

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THE WILL TO DOUBT

AN ESSAY IN PHILOSOPHY FOR THE
GENERAL THINKER

BY
ALFRED H. LLOYD

Truth hath neither visible form nor body ; it is without habitation or name ;
like the Son of Man it hath not where to lay its head.



LONDON
SWAN SONNENSCHN & CO., LIM.
25 HIGH STREET, BLOOMSBURY, W.C.
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PREFACE.

THE chapters that follow comprise what might be called an introduction to philosophy, but such a description of them would probably be misleading, for they are addressed quite as much to the general reader, or rather to the general thinker, as to the prospective student of technical philosophy. They are the attempt of a University teacher of philosophy to meet what is a real emergency of the day, namely, the doubt that is appearing in so many departments of life, that is affecting so many people, and that is fraught with so many dangers, and in attempting this they would also at least help to bridge the chasm between academic sophistication and practical life, self-consciousness and positive activity. With peculiar truth at the present time the University can justify itself only by serving real life, and it can serve real life, not merely by bringing its pure science down to, or up to, the health and the industrial pursuits of the people, but also by explaining, which is even to say by applying, as science is "applied," or by animating the general scepticism of the time.

That this scepticism is often charged to the peculiar

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training of the University hardly needs to be said, but except for its making such an undertaking as the present essay only the more appropriate the charge itself is strangely humorous. One might also accuse the University of making atoms and germs, or, by its magic theories, of generating electricity or disease. Scepticism is a world-wide, life-wide fact; even like heat or electricity, it is a natural force or agent—unless forsooth one must exclude all the attitudes of mind from what in the fullest and deepest sense is natural; scepticism, in short, is a real phase of whatever is real, and its explanation is an academic responsibility. Its explanation, however, like the explanation of everything real or natural, can be complete only when, as already suggested here, its application and animation have been achieved, or when it has been shown to be properly and effectively an object of will. So, just as we have the various applied sciences, in this essay there is offered an applied philosophy of doubt, a philosophy that would show doubt to have a real part in effective action, and that with the showing would make both the doubting and the acting so much the more effective.

But it may be said that effective acting depends, not on doubt, but rather on belief, on confidence or "credit." This will prove to be true, excepting in what it denies. To be commonplace, to write down here and now what is at once the truism and the paradox of this book, a vital, practical belief must always live by doubting. Was it Schopenhauer who

declared that man walks only by saving himself at every step from a fall? The meaning of this book is much the same, although no pessimism is either intended or necessarily implied in such a declaration. Doubt is no mere negative of belief; rather it is a very vital part of belief, it has a place in the believer's experience and volition; the doubters in society, be they trained at the University or not, and those practical creatures in society who have kept the faith, who believe and who do, are naturally and deeply in sympathy. And this essay seeks to deepen their natural sympathy.

Here, then, is my simple thesis. Doubt is essential to real belief. Perhaps this means that all vital problems are bound in a real life to be perennial, and certainly it cannot mean that in its support I may be expected by my readers to give a solution of every special problem that might be raised, an answer to every question about knowledge or morality, about religion or politics or industry, that might be asked. Problems and questions, of course the natural children, not of doubt, but of doubt and belief, may be as worthy and as practical as solutions. Some of them may be even better put than answered. But be this as it may, the present essay must be taken for what it is, not for something else. It is, then, for reasons not less practical than theoretical, an attempt to face and, so far as may be, to solve the very general problem of doubt itself, or say simply—if this be simple—the problem of whatever in general is problematic; and,

this done, to suggest what may be the right attitude for doubters and believers towards each other and towards life and the world which is life's natural sphere; emphatically it is not the announcement of a programme for life in any of its departments.

The substance of chapters I., II., III., IV., and V. in small parts, and VI. and VIII. was given during the summer of 1903 in lectures before the Glenmore School of the Culture Sciences at Hurricane in the Adirondacks, and except for some revision chapters V. and VII. have already been published—*Science*, July 5, 1902, and the *Journal of Philosophy, Psychology and Scientific Methods*, June, 1905.

To Professor Muirhead, the Editor of the Ethical Library, I wish here to express my hearty appreciation of his interest and assistance in the final preparation of this volume for publication.

A. H. L.

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